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SUBJECT: BEIJING GEARS UP FOR JUNE 4 ANNIVERSARY

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Classified By: Classified by Political Minister Counselor Aubrey Carlso
n. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) On the eve of the 20th anniversary of the June 4, 1989 violent crackdown on pro-democracy demonstrators in Tiananmen Square, China's security forces are warning well-known activists against protest activities and putting many under virtual house arrest. Despite tight Party control of Internet content about "June 4," comments by netizens in support of student protester goals as well as video files of the event are accessible. Embassy contacts predict that the combination of tight security, ignorance of the event among many, and low political motivation will succeed in preventing activists from using the occasion to effectively challenge the Party. Two well-placed contacts said that a future official re-interpretation of the crackdown is possible, but it would not happen soon and it would be the result of a change in the political order, not of demands for such a re-interpretation. End Summary.

Roundup of Activists, Internet Loopholes

[1](#)2. (C) China's security forces are warning well-known activists against protest activities on June 4, putting many under virtual house arrest and sending others out of the city, according to Embassy contacts and foreign news reports. In separate emails to PolOff, rights activist Yu Jie and democracy activist Qi Zhiyong (who was wounded by gunfire during the 1989 crackdown) said they were being confined to their homes by security guards and not allowed to see friends or journalists. Each said the security sweep was much broader than during last summer's Beijing Olympics. Yu, who said he was prevented from attending Church on Sundays and that his friends were being harassed, claimed that many people were receiving similar treatment. Qi said that he had received a "severe warning" to not accept phone calls from journalists outside China and that his Internet access was blocked. He anticipated being escorted out of Beijing at some point and only allowed to return to Beijing after the anniversary had passed.

[1](#)3. (SBU) The Party has imposed tight control of June 4-related Internet content, including in blog posts and BBS forum discussions, in the run-up to the anniversary. Although most searches on both Chinese and outside search engines yield few results, the few blogs and BBS posts that are accessible appear to be largely sympathetic to the goals of the 1989 student protestors and urge public discussion of the anniversary (ref C). Despite these Party efforts to block June 4 discussion on the Internet, PolOff discovered a repository of hundreds of June 4-related video files on a Chinese website, all of which could easily be downloaded and

viewed. The files, all from Taiwan media, covered the lead-up to the military crackdown, the massacre itself, and the aftermath of the assault, as well as commemorations of June 4 from 1989 to the present. The files were posted on a popular Internet and media roundup site through a link to "May 35," the code name used by many Chinese netizens to refer to June 4. Blogger contacts of Consulate General Shenyang reported strict censorship of the Internet in northeast China and said they were unable to obtain information on the upcoming anniversary.

Not Much Action Expected

14. (C) Secretary General of the Party School-affiliated think tank China Reform Forum (CRF), Wang Xudong (protect), told PolOffs that although there might be a very small number of minor incidents throughout the country on June 4, in general there was very little awareness of, or interest in, the anniversary among the Chinese public. Wang echoed other Embassy interlocutors in emphasizing that young Chinese citizens of the post-Tiananmen era knew very little about the events of 1989 and that the Party had largely succeeded in insulating this potentially activist segment of the population from using Tiananmen-related grievances as a way to vent political dissatisfaction.

15. (C) Conversations with an Embassy youth contact anecdotally supported Wang's observation. Huang Lin (protect), a late-twenties corporate communications manager in Beijing, said she remembered providing food for both students and soldiers as an elementary school student during

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the 1989 protests, but otherwise had no memory of the event. When she had called a friend who was now a division chief at the Ministry of Commerce for more information, the friend had claimed he could not remember what June 4 was. Huang said she intended to visit the Square on June 4 out of curiosity in case anything happened. She and some friends gathering together that day for a different purpose were jokingly calling their planned meeting a "June 4 commemoration" event.

16. (C) According to Consulate Shenyang contacts, in northeast China teachers similarly did not seem concerned about "issues of stability" and university students were not familiar with the events of June 4. Nonetheless, close contacts at Shenyang Normal University told Consulate officers that the university was required to "keep a close watch on student activities and movements." In addition, the university had been instructed to host a variety "harmonious activities" for the students in the spring and early summer, presumably to keep the students engaged in other affairs.

Zhao, Dissident Message Do not Resonate

17. (C) In the view of Lai Hairong (protect), a prominent scholar at the Central Compilation and Translation Bureau (CCTB), a CCP Central Committee think tank, the June 4 anniversary would not generate political tension "in and of itself." In a meeting with PolOffs June 1, Lai said that the occasion could "be used as a tool by those who want to fan existing resentments" but he did not think this approach would resonate with the public. The economy was doing reasonably well, and people had seen progress in the political sphere, such as increased transparency, respect for human rights, and participation in the political process. Moreover, he said, neither the followers of former Party chief Zhao Ziyang, who was purged following the military crackdown in Tiananmen in 1989, nor contemporary dissidents, had a political vision for China that went beyond the vision that many in China had already embraced. (Note: Zhao's secretly recorded personal recollections of Tiananmen were smuggled out of China and recently made public. Even though PRC media are not allowed to carry news of the memoirs, their

publication is known to many Embassy contacts and has been the subject of the blogosphere.) Lai claimed that because of wide exposure to outside ideas, many people now believed in the ideals of democracy and human rights and were divided only over how best to pursue those ideals.

"Reversal of Verdict" Possible, But Not Soon

18. (C) CRF's Wang emphasized that a reversal of the Tiananmen verdict was not a near-term possibility. He noted that while some foreign observers hoped that a reexamination of the Tiananmen events would help propel democratic reform in China, the reality was just the opposite. It would only be after China adopted democracy that Chinese society would be able to cope with such a reexamination. Indeed, June 4 would be only one, and probably not the most important, of the grievances against the Government and Party that would require reconciliation.

19. (C) CCTB scholar Lai agreed that while one "cannot rule out" an official re-interpretation of Tiananmen in the future, this would not happen in the next ten years. Should such a historical revision occur, he said, it would not be in response to direct demands for a "reversal of verdict," but rather as a result of a broader change in the political and ideological environment. A higher level of human rights protection and more "space" for diversity of views would create the conditions for such a decision, in Lai's view. Most people, he said, agreed that the Party's handling of the student protest through uses of force had been a "harsh over-reaction." However, most also thought the student demands had been unrealistic, Lai said. Therefore, an official re-interpretation would take into account both of these factors. Whatever the true feelings of top leaders regarding the 1989 event, they would have to calculate the costs and benefits of making such a revision: would it benefit them by boosting their legitimacy or would it open the door to ever-expanding political demands?

Comment

10. (C) The PRC Government has devoted a great deal of pressure, propaganda and policy attention to ensuring that the twentieth anniversary of June 4, 1989, will not become a locus for political grievances. Well-placed observers in Beijing -- in the Party, in government and in academia -- generally believe that these efforts have been successful. Given the obvious risk in doing otherwise, most Chinese

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citizens that remember the events of June 4 are choosing to defer any call to reexamine the tragedy for the sake of short-term stability and immediate economic interests.
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